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THE CLAIMS
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HISTORICAL RESEARCH
IN
LONDON.

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LONDON AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH.

The need of further provision for historical studies and the facilities for making that provision in London were indicated by the Minister of Education in an address delivered in May 1919, when he recommended the University to turn its attention to this problem. The ultimate position of a School of History in London depends, indeed, upon considerations which intrude on the domain of a national policy of education which has hardly yet been broached. It is fundamentally a question whether each university is to pursue an independent policy of its own, generally seeking to cover the whole field of knowledge and frequently making provision for studies for no better reason than that adequate provision has already been made elsewhere; or whether the various universities are to be brought within the scope of a national policy which would insist upon co-ordination rather than competition and upon specialisation rather than reduplication. It is, mainly, among subjects of post-graduate research that Universities have to choose for the purpose of specialising their functions.

Hitherto no University in the British Empire has made adequate progress in specialisation for the post-graduate study of historical, political, and legal science. The War has emphasised the national importance of some such development. It has been a matter of public comment that it was not found possible in this country, as it was in the United States of America, to improvise a Board of National Historical Service for the purpose of bringing to bear upon present problems the light of historical knowledge and experience. The principal reason for this defect in national organisation was that there are not in British Universities properly organised departments of History which could be converted to purposes of national investigation; and all that could be done was

to make more or less haphazard application to individual historians and rely upon the results of their single-handed and unco-ordinated efforts. A remedy for this national defect should undoubtedly be sought as an item in national reconstruction, and whether it will be found depends largely upon the action or inaction of the University of London.

For in this respect the University of London stands in a position of peculiar, not to say unique, advantage and responsibility. From the point of view of national equipment, which is the supreme consideration, it is a matter of comparative indifference in what university the highest specialisation is developed in such subjects as chemistry, classics, or mathematics; for these studies are not dependent for their material upon any particular locality. But the wealth of Cræsus will not enable any university other than London to develop the highest specialisation in historical, political, and legal science, since the original materials for such research are for the most part concentrated in the Government and other archives of the Capital of the Empire; they are unique, they cannot be reproduced, and they cannot be transported. If there is to be a national school of research in these branches of study, it cannot be established in any other university. This unique advantage is accompanied by another not less important from the point of view of finance. The materials for historical, political, and legal research are already provided, housed, and cared for at the public expense, and post-graduate students in these branches can pursue their researches in libraries and archives, and with expert assistance, maintained from public funds. What is needed is merely sufficient room and equipment to train students for their work in these national muniments and archives. They cannot be taught or trained in the British Museum, the Public Record Office, or the libraries of government departments, the use of which is restricted to those who are presumably already acquainted with what they want to find and how to find it.

But, while London possesses these unrivalled opportunities for historical research and for the training of students for its pursuit, inadequate provision and organisation have hitherto prevented the University from utilising its advantages and rendering its proper service to the cause of historical scholarship; and owing to this shortcoming, proposals have been made and are still occasionally made to meet the need by the establishment of *ad hoc* and independent schools which

might or might not in time be attached more or less loosely to the University.

The problem is not one of undergraduate education in history, for which admirable provision already exists, nor is it merely a question of providing for the higher studies of students who have already taken a first degree in the University of London. It is rather one of providing for post-graduate students from all over the world who require opportunities and training for the prosecution of original research, especially those who desire to elucidate the history of the English speaking peoples. Although the original sources of that history are for the most part available only in London, most of those students went before the War to Berlin or other German Universities, or to Paris. From this point of view as well as from that of organisation, a few details about the provision for Advanced Historical Studies in Paris may be significant.

Established in 1829, the *École des Chartes* has long enjoyed a world-wide reputation, and its parallel institutions, the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* and the *École libre des Sciences Politiques*, have been almost as successful. But these schools are not strictly University institutions. The *École des Sciences Politiques* is indeed a private institution, governed by a Committee and financed partly by benefactions and partly by the fees it charges; its primary object is to train students for public life, particularly for a diplomatic career, and it does not prepare them for degrees. The *École des Chartes* and the *École des Hautes Études*, on the other hand, are controlled and financed by the Minister of Public Instruction; their courses are held in the buildings of the Sorbonne, but neither the teachers nor the students are necessarily members of the University, and the institutions have nothing to do with University examinations or granting degrees. Distinct from, and independent of, those institutions is an organisation for teaching and research in the history of Paris, which is attached to the City library, maintained by the municipality and conducted by the City Librarian. The Professors of the University itself, moreover, have special courses for research students. This provision in Paris, begun some generations ago, is obviously not the last word in organisation; and in London we should no doubt prefer more co-ordination, a closer connection between the various schools and the University, particularly with respect to

government and the granting of degrees, and an avoidance of the divorce between undergraduate and post-graduate teaching. Nevertheless, it is greatly superior to anything that exists in Great Britain.

Efforts to meet the needs of research students have for several years been made within the University of London, especially by the two incorporated Colleges and by the London School of Economics and Political Science. But the existing arrangements are defective and inadequate; and further development on the same disjointed lines would not only involve much wasteful expenditure in the reduplication of equipment, but would also entail an absence of that co-ordination which is essential in the interests of historical learning.

It is hoped, for instance, to establish a Chair of Naval History and another of Military History; but these are two aspects of the same subject, particularly so far as the British Empire is concerned, and nothing has hampered its understanding more than the habit of treating each in isolation. They overlap at every point, and most of the material for their study would have to be duplicated, unless the research libraries of the two departments were in close juxtaposition and under a common and effective control. Similarly, a movement is on foot to supplement the Chair of Imperial History, which has just been established through the benefaction of the Rhodes Trustees, with a Chair of American History. But down to 1783, at least, the two chairs cover common ground and require much the same equipment in the way of books and documentary material. Again the provision and expense would have to be duplicated if the two departments were kept apart. Foreign history suffers under even greater disabilities from division and gains still more from unity. It is difficult to exaggerate the academic and political disadvantages of providing for the advanced study of French History in one quarter of the University, German History in another, and Russian in a third. The spirit of a university, of scientific investigation, and of academic thought can be preserved only when such problems are treated and studied by teachers and pupils who meet in mutual intercourse on common ground and have constant access to each other's point of view and intellectual environment.

The argument of independence lends especial weight to an appeal for British funds to endow a British university.

London and other British universities have owed much in recent years to the munificence of strangers within our gates, and it would be ungracious not to recognise a debt which has not been counterbalanced by British benefactions in foreign universities. Yet both the wisdom and the dignity of relying on other nations to pay for British education may be doubted. There are searchings of heart in the United States over professorships founded by foreign governments in American Universities and over the influence they have exercised upon American thought ; and we cannot be secure against similar risks so long as we are content to rely on foreign endowments. We are not poorer than the countries which have rendered this assistance ; and London in particular is not more poverty-stricken than Paris, Rome, or Athens. It is surely time that British people and British authorities should recognise the obligation to provide for their own university education.

The appeal is purely one for the advancement of historical studies and understanding, and for such moderate endowment as is needed to make the provision effective. University chairs themselves are useless without the equipment and accommodation for training students. Elaborate buildings and laboratories are not, however, required, but simply accommodation for books, MSS., facsimiles, maps, and plans, and rooms in which the materials for historical investigation can be arranged according to their subject and students trained in the methods of using them. The exigencies of historical research do, moreover, demand, in the interests of teachers and students alike, a certain degree of co-ordination, co-operation, and concentration. Isolation is fatal to the comparative method which is the essence of historical inquiry and induction ; and investigation, fails of its full fruition so long as the investigators into different phenomena lack a clearing-house for their ideas and their results.

Contact with other teachers and with other students is essential both for teachers and for students, and especially for those students who come from other British realms and foreign countries. Their object in coming to London is not to meet only those who have come from the same intellectual atmosphere and are pursuing identical lines of investigation ; and they cannot receive a university education in nationalist conventicles. Nor can University Professors and Readers fulfil a real University function unless a University organisation provides them with the means of research and the



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students to train. The appeal is not for an independent School to compete with existing Colleges but for means to co-ordinate and reinforce the present staff of University teachers, and provide them with the equipment and the opportunity for discharging those post-graduate functions for which their appointment implies that they are qualified.

It is the almost universal custom for graduates of overseas, American, and European universities who aspire to become university teachers to go abroad for wider experience and training in the subjects they hope to teach. Before the War they went anywhere rather than to British Universities because of the lack of some such provision as that for which this appeal is made ; and its absence has cost the Empire not a little in reputation as well as in more material respects. The advancement of knowledge and understanding is the true function of universities ; and if British universities are to make their proper contribution to the total sum, they cannot afford to neglect any means of imparting to those students from abroad who are best qualified to appreciate it a knowledge and understanding of the truth that is embedded in the incomparable records of the Capital of the British Empire.

London alone can render this service to the Empire and to mankind, to the world of learning and to the science of politics. For London alone possesses the means. Its growth as a centre of human activity, embracing nearly two thousand years of history, has culminated in a pre-eminence which cannot be disputed. Its records are unrivalled, its opportunity unique, its privilege complete. It is a city set on a hill, and only the light remains for its citizens to kindle.

A. F. POLLARD.